

VFBV QUARTERLY SUPPLEMENT



March 2024

Welcome to the March edition of the quarterly VFBV feature supplement. The supplement includes relevant news, updates and information on current issues being pursued by VFBV on behalf of members.

VFBV is your association, we encourage volunteers to please stay connected, provide feedback and get involved.

Adam Barnett
CEO, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria.

Additional Resources and Updates Available Electronically

International Women’s Day (8 March 2024)	https://www.internationalwomensday.com/
Open for Consultation Dashboard	https://tinyurl.com/vfbvDashboard
CFA ‘Give us a hand’ Recruiting Toolkit	https://tinyurl.com/vfbv-sup43

VFBV Quarterly Supplement Enclosures

This month’s enclosures include:	Action Required:
1. VFBV Board – Invitation to apply	Please table and note
2. Editorial: Prevention is better than a cure	Please table and note
3. SOP Consultation	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard
4. Editorial: What’s in Store for 2024	Please table and note
5. 2 Minute Briefings (Joint Committee’s)	Please table at your next meeting & pin to noticeboard



VFBV | VOLUNTEER FIRE
BRIGADES VICTORIA

Board Positions

INVITATION TO APPLY

CFA Volunteers are invited to apply for upcoming Board positions.

Vacancies for four board members will arise when the terms of four VFBV Board members expire on 1st October 2024. Of the four members whose terms are expiring, two are eligible for re-appointment.

Terms on the VFBV Board are for two years, and these are honorary positions with no honorarium paid.

The role of the VFBV Board is to manage policy determination, performance and the governance of the Association and working with State Council and our District Council network to engage and consult with volunteers.

The VFBV Board typically meets six times a year and usually on a Friday. Travel reimbursement is provided.

VFBV is seeking applications from gender and culturally diverse candidates, in addition to a diverse range of skills and experience including applicants from a broad range of brigade type and classifications.

Prior experience on a not-for-profit board is not required but is highly regarded, as to is background or experience in volunteer advocacy. Applicants must be a current CFA volunteer.

Scan the QR code or visit
<https://www.vfbv.com.au> for more information.





Prevention is better than a cure

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' February 2024 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

Many of you would have heard the saying that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. And while this is often used in medical circles, it was actually a quote from Benjamin Franklin circa 1735. Often described variously as a writer, scientist, inventor and statesman, he was one of the founding fathers of the United States, and helped draft the declaration of independence, of which he was also a signatory. Most will associate Franklin from their school curriculum with his scientific proposal of flying a kite in a storm to prove that lightning was electricity.

Less known, was that he created one of the first volunteer firefighting brigades (companies as they were called) in America. Colloquially called 'Franklin's Bucket Brigade,' it was the first formally organised all volunteer fire company in the American colonies. What made his brigade distinct was that rather than only being established to protect its members (in the same way early insurance brigades operated in Australia) his brigade protected the entire community, akin to what CFA volunteer brigades do today.

The quote 'an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure' came from a letter Franklin wrote and published in his own newspaper 'The Pennsylvania Gazette' entitled 'Protection of Towns from Fire' that laid out his argument about how a city should prepare itself for a fire. It was motivated by his visit to Boston in 1733 where he was deeply impressed with that city's fire prevention methods.

Looking at how prevention gets completely ignored in fire service outcomes measurements these days makes you wonder how this knowledge was so apparent to Franklin 289 years ago, yet lost on today's legislators.

I remember a previous Chief Officer who frequently reminded members that we have saved more people through CFA's community education and safety activities than over our entire history with big red fire trucks.

Unsurprising, the very first recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (Recommendations 1 to 7) all dealt with improvements to community advice, planning and education. In its final report, the Commission stated it was axiomatic (meaning self-evident) that the most effective way of reducing fire damage and protecting human life is to prevent fires from starting in the first place. It noted,

that while it is impossible to eliminate fires, it is possible to reduce the risk and incidence of fires.

And while the Commission was referencing bushfires, it is important to consider that on average more than one person dies in a house fire in Australia every week. In fact, residential fires cause more deaths each year than floods, storms and bushfires combined.

So what is each fire service actually doing to treat that risk?

CFA's volunteer and community embedded model achieves stronger community resilience than any other comparable model in operation across Australia. In fact, CFA is Australia's second largest urban fire service, second only to Fire Rescue NSW. Consistent with the shared responsibility approach, CFA volunteers are embedded in the very same communities they protect and support community members to recognise and understand their role in fire safety. Much more than just response, CFA brigades cover the entire gamut of prevention, suppression and recovery across the rural and urban environment. Very few other services can claim that.

Judge L Stretton of the 1939 Victorian Bush Fires Royal Commission similarly acknowledged the critical importance of prevention, protection and education. So its not a new concept.

Studies researching preventable residential fire fatalities in Australia are instructive of the key risk factors that contribute to preventable residential fire fatalities. So, what does the data tell us?

Researchers of the most recent report into preventable residential fire fatalities establish that the conceptualisation of fire fatality risk is complex, and that a single risk factor on its own is unlikely to significantly increase a person's risk of dying in a residential fire. It is a combination of individual risk factors mostly centred around the personal circumstance of the individual that has the most bearing. Therefore, fire services that not only treat the symptom but also the cause are the most effective in preventing preventable deaths. Research the Fire District Review Panel would be well advised to consider.

Let's look at some specifics.



Freestanding houses/residences were the housing type where the majority of fatal fires occurred. Residential fire fatalities occur mostly in the winter months, and most commonly occur between the hours of 8pm to 8am, with the most significant spikes between the hours of midnight and 4am. Almost half lived on their own.

Older people represent over a third of total fatalities; and two thirds are people who had a disability. Two thirds were male. Collectively, two thirds had medications or alcohol present in their blood. Social and financial disadvantage was also a significant factor.

Over two-thirds of fatalities were smokers. And despite smoking rates in Australia dropping significantly over the last 30 years (down to 15.5% of the population in 2015), the proportion of preventable residential fire fatalities who are smokers has not significantly changed, meaning they are significantly over-represented in the fatalities. Further, smoking materials themselves are a major source of ignition, with over a third of fatalities relating to smoking in bed.

From a fire service perspective, we don't have much influence over how many people smoke or use medication or alcohol that impairs their ability to awaken. But what we do have influence over is raising awareness of the importance of smoke alarms. Research from AFAC reports that the absence of smoke alarms can increase the possibility of a fatal fire by 60%.

This is where the CFA model really comes to the fore, as it does not simply provide fire suppression. Brigades and volunteers are equally involved in community education and community safety programs that have a larger impact on reducing preventable fire fatalities than any other action, yet inexplicably these programs and measurements do not form part of Victoria's formal performance monitoring framework that is only interested in looking at minutes out the door.

And for proponents of old and non-contemporary unscientific time-based performance measurement of fire services, please note the following.

In today's homes, residents have a safe escape time of only three minutes. This 'three minutes' has often elapsed before emergency services have even been notified. So the most effective action we can take as a fire service is to encourage and support working smoke alarms (especially in high risk homes) and the adoption of residential sprinkler systems.

While public education is often viewed through the prism of TV commercials, boots on the ground is the gold standard. Actually getting out in the community and having these conversations one-on-one and in people's homes is far more effective and what makes a CFA brigade different.

VFBV has long advocated for enhanced fire safety in the residential space, and CFA has partnered with multiple agencies and organisations at the National, State and local levels to

explore options. In last year's Community Safety Joint Committee 2-Minute-Briefings we covered the progress of low cost and affordable sprinkler systems that are being developed by the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, which is a partnership between AFAC and FPAA, and is modelled on an American model that has demonstrated significant success in reducing preventable residential fire fatalities.

Closer to home, CFA brigades like Noble Park Fire Brigade in District 8, for example, are putting theory into practice. The brigade has been documenting the successes of their local campaign, where volunteer firefighters conduct free smoke alarm assessments and replacements across their local community and have been running a very successful multi-lingual program for many years.

For example, in one weekend alone, the brigade visited 152 homes across the greater Dandenong local government area that resulted in; 325 new 10 year smoke alarms being installed; 162 non-compliant smoke alarms being found and replaced; 208 residents were engaged in discussions about improved home fire safety and more than 300 referrals for future installations where local residents were unavailable on the weekend in question.

These kind of numbers are simply unachievable by other models, yet because of how Victoria's outcome frameworks are constructed – they are not seen as core service delivery responsibilities, and nor are they funded as such. As a CFA volunteer you should be exceptionally proud you are part of a fire service that provides unrivalled public safety across the entire prevention, detection, response and recovery gamut. Be proud of your work and be proud of your service. As Victoria's most efficient, effective and value for money fire service, we must remain vigilant to the threat of further cuts that will not only impact CFA, but the very communities that we protect.

VALE

It is with much sadness and a heavy heart that we farewell ex-Captain Garry Mallen of Portland Fire Brigade in District 4, who was lost in the line of duty at a structure fire in the early hours of Tuesday, 30th January. Despite the efforts of CFA, FRV and Ambulance Victoria responders on scene, he was unable to be revived.

Garry was a highly respected and much-loved member and has been with CFA for more than 30 years. He will be deeply missed.

On behalf of VFBV and all fellow CFA volunteers, we offer our deepest condolences to Garry's family, friends and loved ones, including all officers and members of the Portland Fire Brigade and surrounding brigades who are grieving his loss.

I will finish this month by quoting the final paragraph of the firefighters' prayer, that is recalled at each year's annual memorial service; "And if it be, while on the job, I should lose my life, please bless with your sustaining hand, all those I've loved in life."

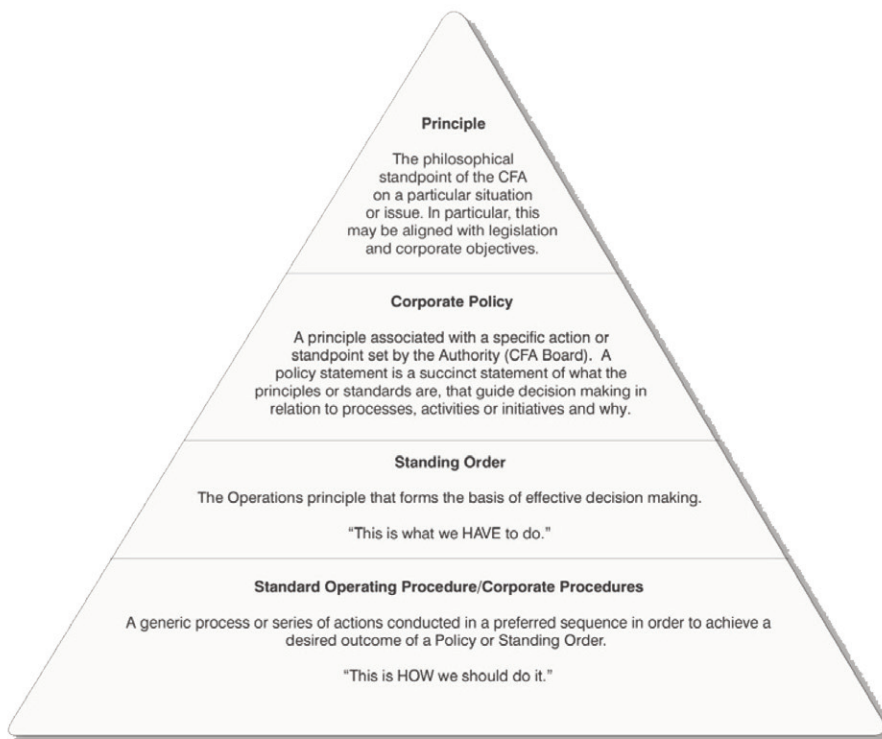
Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

Consultation is underway on a large number of proposed changes CFA is seeking to make to Standard Operating Procedures.

New changes are being released each month, and members are requested to frequently visit our Consultation Dashboard to review any procedures currently under review.

Your feedback and comment helps set VFBV support or non-support for proposed changes, and heavily influences our feedback to CFA. We also regularly provide short surveys to assist you provide feedback on the proposed changes.

Visit www.vfbv.com.au to access the draft SOP's





WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2024

By Adam Barnett, VFBV Chief Executive Officer

Published: 'Fire Wise' January 2024 and adapted for VFBV Quarterly Supplement

My inspiration for this year is a quote from English theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking. *"I have noticed that even people who claim every thing is predetermined and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road."*

The point being, while there are still many questionable policy remnants that will continue to negatively influence the coming year, they are not written in stone. And yes, while there are elements that are written in legislation, legislation can be changed. It just requires a willing hand and some political will.

To temper expectations, I can't claim to hold an abundance of optimism that this will in fact occur over the next 12 months, but I firmly believe that one cannot remain perpetually unswayed by the glaring and mounting evidence that is piling up over the short sightedness and inappropriateness of some current policy settings.

Take the CFA/FRV secondment arrangements as a case in point. And while I could never grasp how anyone in their right mind could have thought that those arrangements would ever work - even discounting brash optimism, rose tinted glasses and questionable political goals, one cannot brush away the stench of a policy that is simply not fit for purpose and proving itself so.

Reviewing the fire services implementation monitor's (FSIM) third annual report which was quietly tabled in Parliament on 29 November, one cannot escape the polite, but nonetheless scathing assessment of the secondment agreement which is at the core of the government's fire services reforms.

The FSIM diligently maps out each of the intersections of the secondment agreement and the resulting incapacity of the CFA to manage its own seconded workforce. Given the cost of these services (approximately \$64M), it should send a shiver down the spines of Victoria's legislators that CFA faces significant and documented legislative barriers that routinely limits CFA's ability to *"be apprised of, investigate, and resolve matters relating to performance, occupational health and safety or disciplinary issues relating to personnel working in CFA in a seconded role."*

Shame on those who did not heed our warnings and advice that this was exactly what was going to occur and be the outcomes of rushed and politically motivated reforms.

FSIM then describes the ludicrous agreed consultation workflow between CFA and FRV, noting that any decisions or proposals are required to be agreed to between FRV and its industrial body first, describing the impacts of a policy setting that languishes from complete paralysis and stone walling. These industrial arrangements do not exist in any other emergency service across the whole of Australia, and for good reason.

Given the government claimed these arrangements would magically solve all industrial disquiet and dispute, one cannot help but observe the complete insincerity those statements appear in hindsight.

The FSIM further observes that while the secondment agreement provided for a review of the operation and effectiveness of the secondment arrangements by 31 October 2021, no such review has been initiated, which is markedly telling of the current political will to sort these arrangements out.

And to finish where I started, am I feeling optimistic that great progress will be made to addressing these fundamental legislative barriers? No, but a new Premier and a refreshed cabinet does provide a face-saving opportunity to set some wrongs right and ensure the Victorian public and volunteer firefighters alike are served by fit for purpose legislation.

The alternative is to squander the opportunity and be publicly lambasted by a future Royal Commission that will no doubt go through the mounting evidence that will expose the rabid political interference that has thwarted and hamstrung one of Australia's largest and most respected volunteer fire services.

CFA BUDGET

We continue to monitor budgetary developments closely and were disappointed to learn that government has finally advised CFA of its base funding for the current financial year, announcing it to be \$310.43 million. This represents a further

\$3 million cut to CFA base funding, and now requires the CFA executive to find efficiencies and savings over the next six months.

This cut also masks the additional cut in real terms that comes from increased costs like wages and conditions flowing from recently agreed industrial bargaining arrangements. And while few would begrudge dedicated and loyal CFA personnel from receiving annual increases to address cost of living pressures, the fact that budgets are not increasing to CFA base funding to cover these additional costs means any increases in expenses have to be absorbed by cuts elsewhere.

I fear many of these cuts will come from reduced staff numbers, as this is the only discretionary cost within CFA's full control.

VFBV has put both government and CFA on notice that any cuts that affect volunteers and front-line service delivery will be documented and raised by whatever means necessary to apply maximum political pressure and ensure the public is aware of what is being done to their emergency services to pay for other follies.

In further news, the government has created an Emergency Services Organisation Finance Board made up of bureaucrats from three government departments including Premier and Cabinet to act as a razor gang of sorts to identify further savings into the future.

All at a time when Victorians are relying on their emergency services more often and for increasing more frequent, severe and simultaneous natural disasters and other emergencies driven by population growth and our changing climate.

We will keep brigades appraised of developments and will need your assistance in demanding that governments live up to their promises of supporting and backing Victoria's selfless emergency service volunteers. Statements of "record funding" are as absurd as they are false, especially when reviewing the ever-decreasing sustainability of CFA's fleet funding over recent years.

The reality of their support appears very different to the endless quotes and platitudes delivered by our politicians during active emergencies and will require volunteers to call it out.

QLD FLOODS

On Christmas eve we received a request from QLD for 100 emergency service personnel to be deployed to QLD to assist them with their flood recovery operations. Twenty teams of four were deployed on 30 December comprising 40 CFA volunteers and 40 SES volunteers equipped with working from heights and chainsaw qualifications. CFA, SES and FFMVic supplied the remaining incident management team and liaison positions.

Given more than 500 CFA volunteer firefighters had only just returned from supporting Queensland's fire season, these incidents demonstrate the increased demand for our professionally trained volunteers, and the increased occurrences of CFA supporting our SES colleagues with storm and flood, not only at home but interstate.

The fact these weather events are increasingly intersecting with fire season activity should sound the alarm of the critical need to ensure each of our volunteer emergency services are well resourced and supported to ensure they can continue to come to our communities' aid in times of disaster.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Needless to say, I think we are going to have a challenging year ahead, but one I feel we are well prepared for. A little bit like that saying that the strongest steel is forged from fire and being repeatedly struck, I hold the same confidence in our volunteers and our association.

Because we are used to working in emergencies, we are well equipped to face a dynamic ever-changing environment. In my experience, we not only rise to meet the challenge, but usually surpass all expectations. People underestimate us at their peril.

In this vein and in an effort to try and finish on a positive note, I am somewhat buoyed by the increased volunteer participation in our feedback requests and mechanisms. In recent times we have had a number of items out for broader consultation that have elicited significant feedback and comment. And while more controversial changes tend to illicit higher amounts of feedback, I have been really impressed with the depth of feedback and the seriousness in how people have reviewed proposed changes. Blunt yes, but no doubt sincere.

It's easy to hate as they say, but I continue to be humbled by the respectful and well thought out positions and oppositions to what can sometimes be a complex interplay between various CFA proposed policies, procedures and our volunteer culture.

Know that when you provide this feedback through VFBV channels it is treated with respect and confidentiality and significantly influences VFBV's advocacy.

Please keep it coming. We'll continue to develop short surveys on specific changes or policies to assist people provide feedback. It really helps us improve CFA policy, and the more voices the more powerful the weight of our argument. And the more detailed your feedback, the better it equips us to navigate any pushback from on high.

But don't be discouraged if you don't want to write pages and pages of feedback. Your questions, simple markup, or even a comment or two can provide really helpful insights.

Don't forget that our current annual vol survey is open, and will be closing shortly. This is the most simple and most effective way of letting us know what is working and what isn't. So, if you haven't yet completed it, please pop over to vfbv.com.au/cfa or use the QR code on this page. You can even ask us for a paper version should you wish and we'll post one out to you.

Your association is only as strong as your contribution to it, so please help us help you and get involved today. With choppy financial winds on the horizon, I have a feeling we are going to need each other

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CROP FIRE BEHAVIOUR RESEARCH

CFA, in partnership with the CSIRO, has been conducting research into the behaviour of fire in crops. Experientially it has been understood that fire behaves differently in crops but there has never been a model that has been specifically designed to understand how fire will behave in crops. Previously all assumptions on fire behaviour in crops are based upon how fire behaves in grasslands regardless of the type of crop being grown.

Crop fires are a significant risk to the agricultural sector and local communities. In 2015 a fire caused by lightning near Esperance in Western Australia burned through 100,000 hectares in a single day and led to a loss of four lives and estimated half a billion tonnes of grain. In the same year, an 85,000-hectare fire in South Australia resulted in 2 fatalities and the loss of 100 million tonnes of agricultural crops in a single afternoon.

Initial experiments have been conducted on wheat crops at a property near Wallinduc, Southwest of Ballarat. A paddock was divided into 50 x 50 metre square blocks with fuel prepared to replicate a range of crop conditions (i.e. harvested, unharvested, and harvested and baled). These were then burned under a variety of different fire weather conditions and with fuel density and fuel moisture content being recorded before each burn. During each burn the flame height and rate of spread was recorded. In total 53 burns were conducted and 45 used for analysis by the CSIRO.

The three most common crops in Victoria are wheat, canola and barley. Research experiments have recently been conducted on canola with further experiments to be conducted in the future.

It is hoped that this research will help guide farmers on harvesting best practice as well as help determine Fire Danger Ratings and support analysis when deciding on Total Fire Bans during the Fire Danger Period.

This research will also in turn provide for better understanding on how to best to control fires when they occur in crops and allow better information and warnings being able to be issued to the community.

JOINT FUEL MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Joint Fuel Management Program for 2023-25 was endorsed by the Chief Officer in September 2023. The program is a collaboration between CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) for the fuel management on both public and private land. The program's aim is to burn 28,000 Hectares of land over the next three years.

The program has been developed by CFA and FFMVic in consultation with landowners, businesses, communities, traditional owners, and other key stakeholders. The purpose of these burns will vary and include reducing bushfire risk, regeneration, agricultural purposes and cultural heritage. The majority of CFA led burns will be roadside burns with an estimated 600km to be targeted.

The program is available for public access by visiting <https://www.ffm.vic.gov.au/bushfire-fuel-and-risk-management/joint-fuel-management-program>.

DELIVERY OF COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN FRV FIRE DISTRICTS

In June last year we reported that the Chief Officer released an Operations Bulletin (2023/001) for co-located and surrounding brigades wishing to conduct community engagement activities or programs within Fire Rescue Victoria areas. This Operations Bulletin is intended to provide clarity to brigades on the process for them before delivering activities within FRV areas as well as the responsibility of FRV to communicate with brigades if FRV also have plans to deliver a similar community engagement activity within a similar timeframe. VFBV is continuing to monitor the practical implementation of this and is seeking feedback from brigades on how these processes are working.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Equipment & Infrastructure

March 2024

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

PUMPER REFURBISHMENTS

CFA has revealed that the proposed refurbishment program for the old-style type 3 pumpers is in doubt after preliminary investigations determined it will be too expensive. Delegates were disappointed to also hear that the 6 ex NSW fire Mercedes Atigo cab chassis that CFA purchased with the intent on replacing six old pumper cab chassis' are also unsuitable due to height issues which would flow onto stations also needing modification to fit them in. The project will be reviewed internally at CFA and an assessment will be made on whether refurbishment of appliances is a viable option, prior to a decision being made. Brigades earmarked to receive the refurbished pumpers will be disappointed if the outcome of refurbishments doesn't proceed as it was seen as a viable solution to the aging fleet concerns. CFA stated that this will also be taken into consideration on the costings and once there is an outcome, communications will be distributed to answer any anticipated concerns. CFA also noted that the cab chassis already purchased for the refurbishment project may be suitable for other programs of work in the near future, but further work would need to be undertaken to assess suitability. The committee will continue to monitor.

WORKWEAR ORDERING

Delegates have continued to raise with CFA the question of when members can finally order workwear through the State Logistics Centre (SLC). While the initial rollout provided a set number of sets per brigade, feedback continues to demonstrate there is high demand for additional sets and especially for new members who missed out on the initial rollout. Delegates have also passed on the feedback from existing members who received the initial set who are also requesting a process for the required replacement of the issued workwear through damage, fading or just worn out from use as it now forms an integral part of interstate deployments, training activities and community facing meetings.

While there were some volunteers who were sceptical of the new workwear at first, it is pleasing to see workwear has been embraced across all parts of the State and justifies VFBV's very long campaign to achieve it. From the Chief down, workwear is the same no matter if you are paid or not and provides a unified look that ensures all CFA members are seen as highly trained and professional, achieving our aim of unifying all CFA members to our common purpose. CFA advised that an ordering process is a high priority for them and work is underway that would allow orders to be placed with the SLC, but because of the growing interest, supply has been a huge challenge, with some elements of the initial rollout still impacted by supplier constraints. Also based on member feedback, VFBV has supported CFA's intent to introduce an alternate female trouser design, and CFA advised that trials are also being conducted to explore adding a skirt to the workwear range in the future depending on member feedback.

STREAMLINING BRIGADE PROJECTS PROCESS

VFBV frequently receives feedback from members about how hard it can be to navigate brigade led major and minor works projects and the required approvals etc. with our observation that some brigades struggle because the process is not well documented or understood including at times within CFA. Delegates have requested a streamlined process specifically for brigade projects that would provide better guidance of what is required and how to go about it. CFA has agreed to review its process, but also reminded members that brigades should nominate a contact person who can liaise with the regional project coordinators in the first instance. Every project is allocated to these regional staff who can communicate the status of specific projects back to the brigade and source any further information required. CFA is now working on drafting a new guideline manual with explanations and definitions for each type of works, both major and minor. The manual will include advice on how to approach contractors, District HQ responsibilities and a step-by-step procedure and checklist that brigades can use throughout the planning and works process to gauge progress and the next steps required to be taken. We will advise of progress as the draft proceeds through initial consultation.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT HUB

Volunteers are seeing the benefits of the changes to the Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH) implemented in December but are looking forward to continued performance improvements. The main areas of concern come from those parts of the State with poor internet coverage. Improved Brigade Captain/Secretary visibility and email advice has seen an improvement in application movement. The progression past the current 'blockers' e.g. WWCC (now able to progress to 'Fit for Work' without waiting for the WWCC number) has improved the process.

Transfers between Brigades remain problematic with further investigation at State, District, and Brigade level required, which the committee is monitoring. CFA has reported that further enhancements will follow with a further version 4.2 rolling out in April/May 2024. Captains and Secretaries are requested to continue to monitor these upgrades and any future changes and report any issues to the VRH team at volrecruihub@cfa.vic.gov.au

2024 CHAMPIONSHIPS

With the 2024 State Firefighting Championships just around the corner, delegates continue to call for the dissemination of the 2023 State Firefighter Championships Review Report. CFA has been advising the committee for some time that the 2023 report is 'almost completed', however delegates wonder of the value of the report given that planning for 2024 is in its peak and that lessons from last year's event will not be able to be implemented before this year's event in March.

In the meantime, the Urban Competition Committee and Rural competition committees are focused on making the event more successful and enjoyable than ever with a great deal of work being done to ensure that the events are relevant to fire ground practices so that members gain skills they can use back at their brigades to protect their communities.

VFBV encourages volunteers and their families to come along to Mooropna for the State Junior Urban Championship on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th March and for the State Urban Senior and State Rural Junior and Senior Championships on the weekend of March 23 and 24. For more information head to the VFBV website <https://www.vfbv.com.au> or CFA's webpage - <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/resources/events/firefighter-state-championships/2024-state-championships-mooropna>.

CFA SERVICE AWARD UPGRADE KITS

Late last year CFA sought VFBV views on a CFA proposal to discontinue the awarding of full-service medals, and a plan to only award 'upgrade kits' for each 5 yearly service award anniversary after 10 years. The intent was for members to remove their old ribbon bar from their existing medal, and sew the new ribbon bar in the upgrade kit to their own medals.

VFBV advised CFA it did not support this proposal, and reminded CFA that the change to full-service medals was done in 2008 to address volunteer complaints about CFA removing the free upgrade service that CFA used to provide for members to have their medals professionally upgraded. We also advised CFA of the potential blow back that would occur in what would clearly be seen as a cost saving exercise to the only internal system of recognition in place for volunteers completing 10 or more years of voluntarily service.

Following deliberation, CFA has recently advised that the CFA Honours, Awards and Remembrance Board Committee had reconsidered its proposal, and decided not to proceed with any changes based on the feedback received. This is a good outcome and ensures volunteers will continue to be recognised with full-service medals. Volunteers who would prefer just the upgrade kit may specifically request a kit instead of their medal prior to their anniversary should they wish.

VFBV has also requested CFA advocate to the federal government to provide an upgrade service for volunteers receiving additional clasps to their National Medals and the National Emergency Medal. CFA has consented to providing this advocacy and will keep us informed of progress.

2 Minute Briefing

Joint Operational Capability

March 2024

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

PUMPING PITS DECISION

Delegates have been waiting for CFA to communicate its future plans for the use of pumping pits. Previous VFBV 2 minute briefings have kept members updated on the progress of Pumping pits since CFA issued a Safety Alert in 2015 suspending their use. VFBV has continued to advocate that rather than ban the use of Pumping pits and disadvantage brigades that use them for training that a maintenance program to ensure they are safe to use is the best option.

CFA has determined that the 58 pumping pits across the state are non-compliant and will not be reinstated, claiming there is no cost effective means of rehabilitating them. CFA advise it is currently looking at an alternative solution of providing brigades with a 2000lt collar tank. Delegates have expressed their disappointment in the decision and asked CFA to ensure that adequate training and communication be provided to ensure the safe use, maintenance and storage of the collar tanks before brigades use them. CFA has agreed to formally write to all brigades who have a pumping pit advising them of the decision and the results of the testing and what the proposed solution is moving forward. VFBV has also raised concerns with the manual handling implications of using collar tanks regularly for training and will continue to monitor. Brigades are requested to contact us once they receive CFA's formal communication with any concerns.

ELECTRIC VEHICLE RESPONSE

For some time now delegates have been raising the regular requests from volunteers for CFA to update training and protocols to deal with the ever-changing scenarios on alternative fuels and electric vehicles in particular. With more and more electric vehicles on the roads brigades are being exposed to scenarios that involve electric vehicles more often than in the past. In pleasing progress, CFA has introduced six new videos on the intranet that assist members to identify, immobilise and isolate electric vehicle in emergency situations. It is worth noting that while there is information available to identify and assist in electric vehicle scenarios there has been no complete extinguishment methods for electric vehicles approved in Australia to date. CFA is developing a range of electric vehicle and battery fire SOPs and will release them for consultation when drafts are completed. Interested members can type in 'electric vehicles' into the members online search field to access the videos.

CFA OPERATING MODEL

CFA commenced work back in 2022 to identify what improvement opportunities there are to CFA's Operating Model. Statewide workshops were conducted, and a roadmap of initiatives was developed. 29 initiatives have been included in the roadmap and have been divided into a phased 3-part program. Stream 1 has six key initiatives aimed at improving the experience of brigades and groups. Stream 2 has nine initiatives aimed at District, Region and State delivery and Stage 3 includes 14 initiatives aimed at overall Organizational Reform. Committee delegates have asked CFA to keep them informed as the progress of the 29 initiatives is progressed and we will keep members informed of the progress. Members can find out more information by typing 'operating model' into the search function in the members online search field.

PPC TRIALS FOR 2024

New PPC trials will commence in 2024 for various items where the current supplier contracts are expiring. CFA has now committed to volunteer field trials to review new structural firefighting gloves. VFBV has in the past received a lot of criticism relating to the current structural gloves in regard to sizing and dexterity and is pleased to observe there are many new gloves now on the market. While loss of dexterity compared to the previous FirePro 2 glove was a result of modified performance standards, when CFA originally went to tender for the current glove there was very few options available. Over the past few years this has changed and there is now a greater choice of glove manufacturers on the market, which provides an opportunity to compare next generation gloves for dexterity and tactility, while also ensuring CFA can explore a greater size range to cater for all firefighters.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

DPC INCONSISTENCIES

Delegates have been raising the concerns raised by some Group Officers regarding the inconsistencies with the DPC process across the State. While many districts offer a District Planning Committee structure with good consultation and processes for volunteer input there are also many that reportedly operate in an environment of secrecy and little genuine consultation or communication to the members they affect the most - volunteers. Many years ago, as a part of the Chief Officers 5 priority projects a pilot DSAT (District Strategic Advisory Team) was trialled in place of the DPC process in 3 Districts. While this only lasted briefly in 2 districts there is still one district running this project and there has been no review or report to show its effectiveness (or not). Group Officers have recently raised concerns with VFBV that they feel there are changes being made to DPC's that potentially water down the input from volunteers and have the potential to operate more as a rubber stamp. CFA has agreed to explore these reports and work with the committee to review the DPC processes across the state and highlight any inconsistencies, including identifying the areas that are working well and those that are challenging.

SDRC SYSTEM IMPROVEMENTS

Delegates have participated in a recent workshop with CFA on ways to improve the volunteer experience when making fire reports to the Service Delivery Reporting Centre (SDRC). The workshop was requested to address recent volunteer complaints and sought to seek ways that would improve the volunteer experience when reporting incidents and brigade activities. In the second half of 2023 CFA reduced the hours of operation for the call takers at the SDRC advising that the improvements to the online reporting system had meant that the call takers were taking less and less calls. This resulted in volunteers only being able to call the centre Mon-Fri during business hours.

During discussions, CFA has reiterated it is keen to look at ways to improve the volunteer experience in a range of fields by reducing paperwork, bottlenecks and administrative tasks for BMT's. Delegates have highlighted many ways to reduce the impact and time taken in filling out forms for items such as volunteer status forms, hose testing, skills maintenance, chemical registers and online booking systems for meeting rooms and facilities. VFBV will continue these conversations and our advocacy is to ensure the volunteer experience is always at the forefront of any changes to the system.

POST INCIDENT AARS

As members would be aware, VFBV has been advocating the importance of volunteer involvement in after action reviews. And while initial focus has been on cross-agency debriefs, the same principles apply for internal AAR's that frequently occur after incidents.

Delegates have raised concerns that it is taking considerable time to action AAR's and for reporting of the outcomes. CFA has advised committee delegates that they are not able to process post incident After Action Reviews any faster than is happening now.

Delegates have stressed that volunteers are providing feedback to CFA after an incident in the hope that improvements can be raised and implemented as quickly as possible to improve the outcomes for everyone. CFA has employed a new staff member in the hope that the quality of information is improved with the intent that members can then focus on building a better process and that the outcomes and suggested improvements can be made as soon as possible. VFBV has also highlighted to CFA that often cross agency AAR times are not volunteer friendly. Again, volunteers have suggested that a consistent standardised approach could be developed to ensure that the right information is captured, and changes reported immediately. CFA has agreed to report to the committee on the status of AAR's and activity at the next meeting.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

CFA COMPLAINTS PROCESS (HR BUSINESS PARTNERS)

The committee has discussed potential changes to the structure of the CFA HR Department that CFA is considering and has outlined the impact those changes could have on the complaints process and the experience of volunteers. The final arrangement is yet to be decided. VFBV maintain that further and ongoing training & development for HR Business Partners is crucial to the level of service provided to members and should be considered by CFA in whatever decision is reached regarding the HR Department. HR Business Partners play a pivotal role in the initial stages of all complaints but more so in informal matters. These informal matters are many and they are complex and challenging and in delegates view the better trained and equipped HR Business Partners are, the better and more effectively these matters will be dealt with.

Delegates also pursued the issue of what data was being recorded in LawVu around informal complaints. In order for VFBV to better monitor the effectiveness of CFA's dealing with informal complaints, VFBV requested that CFA consider the following information be collected and reported on:

- Start date of complaint – when CFA District/HR is first alerted to a concern/complaint
- The incident (interpersonal conflict, conflict with District, incident on fire ground, complaint/comment by member of the public)
- Action taken – what action is taken at each juncture along the journey of the complaint, i.e. Captain intervention (i.e. conversation with parties), District (i.e. Preliminary Assessment), HR Bus Partner (i.e. Facilitative conversation/mediation), Resolution Support (i.e. Support or Advice) and what Case Management is provided to the member (how is the complainant/respondent/others informed of the progress of the complaint/matter)
- Is/are member(s) suspended/stood down and by whom
- Who, if any one person, maintains ownership/management of the complaint

These discussions are to continue and the VFBV/CFA working group will work closely to monitor informal matters and continue to try and improve the process for volunteers.

DISTRICT OH&S COMMITTEES

The committee was updated on the Terms of Reference developed by the VFBV/CFA working group for District OH&S Committees. Overall delegates were happy with the document, but VFBV identified a number of concerns around wording of the document and how it could be considered restrictive to some committees. In order to address those concerns, CFA responded that they would word the Terms of Reference to allow for flexibility in the way that Districts conducted their committees and encourage those existing committees who are meeting regularly and working effectively to continue to do so in a way that suits their members and District. CFA has advised they don't wish to override these committees. CFA do however wish to encourage other Districts who are yet to establish District OH&S Committees to adopt the Terms of Reference as a foundation and to guide their local processes.

BRIGADE HEALTH AND SAFETY CO-ORDINATORS

CFA has established that the role of Brigade H&S Co-ordinator lacks profile and role clarity. Delegates agreed and stressed that in order to attract more members to the role, CFA might consider making the role part of the BMT or part of a lieutenant's duties and not just default to the Captain, as is currently the case in many brigades. Delegates also suggested online learnings that explain the role requirements and ongoing training and development for members would be beneficial. CFA could also consider raising awareness of the purpose and use of CFASafe, and continue to provide hardcopy methods of reporting. Also suggested was that this role could potentially be shared by a number of members and not just fall to one volunteer. The VFBV/CFA working group will contribute to developing this role.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

3G TELEPHONE NETWORK

CFA has advised members of the committee that the 3G mobile telephone network is being phased out by the telcos over the next 12 months with Vodafone having commenced decommissioning in December 2023. Telstra will follow in June 2024 and Optus in September 2024. CFA believe this will not be an issue moving forward as the respective telecommunications providers are expected to ensure there is sufficient phone coverage under 4G as a minimum before turning off their 3G network. If members are using an old 3G handset they will need to upgrade their handpiece before the shutdown dates. The biggest concern is the various modems and items such as community alert sirens to ensure they are compatible with the system changes and brigades are encouraged to identify any older devices as soon as possible. Brigades concerned about coverage are encouraged to contact their Federal Parliamentarian to advocate increased coverage under assistance programs such as the Black Spot Program, the Regional Connectivity Program (RCP) or the Peri-Urban Mobile Program (PUMP).

RADIO REPLACEMENT PROGRAM

Delegates have asked CFA as to whether a bag radio was being offered as part of the radio replacement program and has been confirmed that it will be available. When pressed as to whether the results of the VFBV's survey conducted back in 2020 had been considered which recommended a smaller footprint for better flexibility and single cab vehicles, CFA advised that due to the requirements under the Australian Design Rules (ADR's) it was not possible to use a smaller backpack unit. The other deciding factor is that the Motorola radio is approximately one third larger than the current Tait radios and that the original space is almost taken up. The new radios would include duress alarms, enhanced coverage, clearer audio quality, radio identification and reduced interference which will be consistent across all CFA districts. CFA has also advised members that the training packages for the new radios will involve both an online version and face to face version.

MOBILE DATA CAPABILITY

Brigades wishing to purchase or upgrade their existing tablets will be pleased to know that CFA is designing a process and specifications advice as to the type of approved tablet. The CFA advised delegates that the project is investigating the possibility of Brigades purchasing their own tablet provided it meets the specifications developed by CFA. In addition to the specification's requirement, the device must be purchased through CFA ICT, at the Brigade's cost, and have the SOTI application (an enterprise mobility solution to manage the applications on the device) installed. As soon as the specifications are developed, we will advise where the documentation is available.

NATIONAL PUBLIC SAFETY MOBILE BROADBAND (PSMB)

The Committee was informed by CFA that the earlier discussion at the Federal Government level on the dedicated National Public Safety Mobile Broadband is back on the agenda again, however not under the same plan as previously. The Federal Government Department NEMA (led by CFA ex-Chief Officer Joe Buffone PSM GAICD) is leading the project with EMV and with Department of Treasury involvement. The PSMB will provide emergency services with critical interoperability between agencies and access to reliable and modern communication technology. The latest technology introduced includes an option to use the Low Earth Orbiting (LEO) satellite system (along the same lines as Starlink) as a possibility for being the building blocks for the "new" paging system and mobile data of the future.

Quick snapshot of the priority issues and actions from discussions between CFA and VFBV.

MOBILE PROP AVAILABILITY

Delegates have been receiving reports of Brigades being told by their District staff that they can no longer access mobile props for training at their Stations. The reason given has been that they are within 100 Km of a CFA Training Ground and, as such, must now use the Training Ground. This presents Brigades with the obvious problems of extra time and work involved in booking, travelling to and from and checking in and out of the Training Ground as well as appliances being used out of their response areas. Brigades had also raised operational impacts where they would have to be stood down while out of town attending a Training Ground and other brigades having to cover while training occurs.

Delegates have raised this issue with CFA and it has been communicated that they are indeed trying to encourage increased use of the Training Grounds as they have better facilities and training available when compared to the mobile props. CFA has committed to Brigades still being able to utilise mobile props where they have a specified need or genuine reason. Brigades that require props should apply for them through the existing process, ensuring to clearly detail their reason for needing the prop at their Station. VFBV supports all brigades having access to mobile props.

STRIKE TEAM LEADER COURSE DEVELOPMENT

Delegates to the committee are acutely aware of the problems that not having the Strike Team Leader training available to members for several years is causing. The Committee has been continuously pursuing CFA over getting the new Strike Team Leader course completed and available to members. CFA released a draft of the course in May 2023 with committee members and other volunteer SMEs providing feedback and participating in Working Group sessions. Members involved in the consultation sessions were pleased that the materials were quite good and there were only some relatively minor changes to be made as well as the addition of some sections covering the "people management/soft skills" essential for a good Strike Team Leader.

CFA has since been reworking the course to include both the feedback from committee members and some substantial additions being made from internal CFA feedback. CFA is hoping to have the course available to members well before the next fire season. Delegates will be closely monitoring this progress and pushing CFA to meet this deadline in an effort not to cause any more operational issues for Brigades and Groups through not being able to train new Strike Team Leaders.

GAS FLARE-OFF TRAINING

CFA has previously advised delegates that the props used in the Gas Flare Off training need to be upgraded to meet changing OHS standards. This has resulted in Brigades not having access to Gas Flare Off training for an extended period of time. Members of the committee have been pushing CFA to rectify this and the committee have been advised by CFA that the gas flare-off props are currently being upgraded to the new specifications by an external contractor. Two sets of props are being upgraded with plans to initially locate them at the Training Grounds at Bangholme and Huntly with the ability to relocate them to other grounds as required. CFA is hoping to have this work completed and training available to members in the 2nd quarter of this year.

DRIVING INSTRUCTOR COURSES

In an effort to maintain and hopefully increase their Driver Training capacity, CFA is planning to conduct three Driving Instructor courses this year. One of these courses will be a dedicated female only course with the intent to bridge the gap that exists in female Driver educators. Any member wishing to become a Driving Instructor should contact their District Coordinator of Learning Development for more information and to register their interest in attending one of the Driving Instructor courses.



STATE FIREFIGHTER CHAMPIONSHIPS

Urban Junior State Championship	16 and 17 March 2024
Urban Senior State Championship	23 and 24 March 2024
Rural Senior State Championship	23 March 2024
Rural Junior State Championship	24 March 2024

The CFA-VFBV State Firefighter Championships will be held at Mooroopna later this month on consecutive weekends.

The first weekend, 16 and 17 March, will see 38 teams compete for the State Urban Junior Championship across 18 events.

Action on the following weekend will see 87 senior teams and 38 junior teams take part in the State Rural Senior and Junior Championships and the State Urban Senior Championship, competing across both urban and rural tracks in a celebration and showcase of CFA and championships.

On the evening of Saturday 23rd March the spectacular Torchlight Procession will be held, this year through the streets of Mooroopna, in an impressive display of CFA to the community.

Participating are not only brigades competing in the Urban Senior Championship, but also teams from the Rural Championship and some non-competing brigades.

To ensure the successful conduct of the Championships, more than 200 VFBV Judges and Officials volunteer their time and expertise over each weekend to ensure that the State Championships maintain the high standard developed over many years. VFBV thanks all these members for their commitment and encourages any new members interested in nominating as a Judge to contact VFBV at championships@vfbv.com.au

Across the two weekends of the Championships there will also be displays from a range of CFA departments as well as a number of different appliances on display– all CFA volunteers are welcome to attend even if you aren't competing in the Championships.

More information for competing brigades for both the Rural and Urban Championships can be found on the VFBV website www.vfbv.com.au